



# FACT SHEET

VirginiaDOT.org

CONTACTS: Wanda Gill (757) 925-2584  
Cell (757) 374-9825  
[Wanda.Gill@VDOT.Virginia.org](mailto:Wanda.Gill@VDOT.Virginia.org)

May 23, 2006

## VDOT FACILITY HURRICANE CLOSURE CHECKLIST

### ***What is VDOT's plan?***

With the help of Virginia Department of Emergency Management and local governments, VDOT continues to develop and maintain guidelines to safely close area bridges and tunnels during hurricane conditions. These guidelines allow crews enough time to close and evacuate these structures before they become unsafe for travel. Facility closure timing will be based on winds, storm surge, rain bands and actual conditions at the facility. Area residents should already have evacuated to permanent shelter prior to arrival of conditions that would trigger the closure of these facilities.

### ***What are the triggers that will close the tunnels?***

There are two different thresholds that help trigger facility closures.

On the Midtown Tunnel, a closure decision will be based upon the onset of tropical force winds of 39 miles per hour, in combination with other factors including the rain band, storm surge, and traffic conditions when a hurricane is tracking toward Virginia and conditions are expected to get worse.

For the Monitor Merrimac Bridge-Tunnel, the Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel, the James River Bridge, the Coleman Bridge and the High Rise Bridge, closure decisions will be based on the onset of 45 mile per hour winds when a storm is heading toward Virginia and conditions are predicted to get worse.

Closure timing will be based on winds, storm surge, rain bands and actual conditions at the facility. Each facility manager will monitor the conditions at their facility and make the final decision about closing. The procedures put into place with this plan will help to provide them with all of the information and support they need to conduct a safe and efficient closing operation.

### ***Won't the closure of tunnels impede evacuation attempts for motorists trying to get out of the way of a storm?***

Area residents should already have evacuated to a permanent shelter prior to arrival of conditions that would trigger the closure of these facilities. VDOT will wait to close the tunnels until the last possible timeframe where they can be closed safely, leaving enough time for crews can take shelter.

VDOT will communicate the approximate timing of closures and any possible alternate routes using the media and VDOT resources such as 511, [www.VirginiaDOT.org](http://www.VirginiaDOT.org), highway advisory radio, electronic message signs and other technology. All efforts will be made to notify the public of these closures prior to their implementation.

***What will motorists do if VDOT closes down all of the bridges and tunnels?***

VDOT will not close the tunnels until the height of a storm when conditions become unsafe for driving. Motorists should already be off the road and in permanent shelter when facilities are closed.

***Why does the plan allow for each facility to make their own decision on closures?***

Although the plan outlines the meteorological factors that will trigger the final stage of closure plans, conditions at each individual facility may vary. VDOT will communicate all weather information to the facilities as storms approach, but the facility managers are the best judges of actual conditions at their facility. This will ensure that these facilities remain open to traffic as long as it is safe.

***When does the plan say VDOT crews will take shelter during the storm?***

VDOT will cease routine operations prior to the onset of 45 mile per hour winds. This will allow VDOT time to ensure the safety of its personnel. Crews will then take cover to stage resources and plan for the recovery after the storm. This will ensure that VDOT resources are available to respond to downed trees, roadway damage or any other issue that would impede a return to normal traffic flow following the storm.

***We have also heard that VDOT will install gates at area interchanges to facilitate the reversal of the interstate. What is the status of that project?***

VDOT is in the process of installing gates at each of the ramps along I-64 to help emergency responders reverse the flow of traffic on the interstate more quickly during a major evacuation. While the gates are not all yet installed, VDOT does have plans to use portable blockades to close the ramps should it be necessary. Only the Governor can call for a reversal of the interstate for evacuation.

The installation of these gates will free up VDOT, law enforcement and military resources to respond to other needs during severe weather or other incidents involving the interstate. Currently, the closing of highway ramps requires personnel and vehicles to be dispatched to position the ramp closure. The gates would allow VDOT to securely shut these ramps and dispatch those personnel to other areas. The installation of the gates will also speed up the implementation of any evacuation or interstate reversal plan.

(END)

**Attachments: VDOT Hurricane Evacuation Routes**